

Dan and Laurel's Big Adventure

Or

Are there always soldiers with
machine guns on the streets of Paris?

Dan Goes to Toledo, Spain

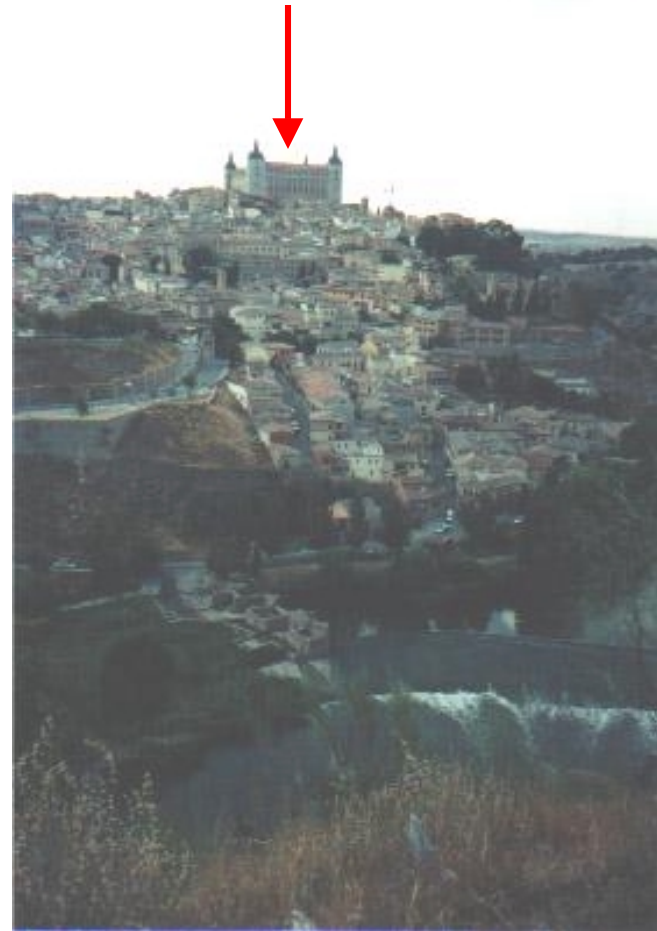
No, the Mudhens were not in town.



Roman ruins, from the
Roman occupation

Toledo is approximately 100 km southwest of Madrid, and has been repeatedly sacked, overrun, etc. since the 11th century. The city is currently divided into the Christian, Jewish, and Arab quarters (yes that is only three quarters). The city is surrounded on three sides by the Rio Tajo and sits above the local terrain on a mesa. The remaining side is protected by a wall.

Alcazar, the castle built
during the roman epoch,
and strengthened during the
arab occupation.





Being an old, walled city, the streets are a bit narrow. This is one of the smallest. The record is 83 cm wide. The story told by our tour guide is that young women from Toledo can honestly tell their fathers that they didn't leave their rooms when explaining their unexpected pregnancies.

Gratuitous Cathedral. Construction began in 1226 and only finished in the 1770's. The front door (below) is now reserved for VIP's only. No pictures allowed inside, sorry.





This is a covered courtyard outside the cathedral. The murals along the walls (you can kind of make out the one on the back wall) tell the story of one religious group capturing and torturing children from another to make point to the parents of the second group. (I think it was Christians and Jews, but I'm not sure).

Spain sure used to be a really fun place, n'est-ce pas?



Saint Martin's Bridge

The traditional entrance to Toledo over the Rio Tajo.

A view from Saint Martin's Bridge back up the river along the side of Toledo.



Enough of Spain, Bring on Paris

At least the food will be better,
maybe it won't rain



Laurel joins the tour!

We found Sam the Eagle and his brother hanging out on the top of the Notre Dame tower tour.

A cautionary note to
Edi, our cockatiel to
behave in the future ...





I tried to take Laurel to the Louvre, but she only wanted to see the exterior. Maybe next time...

More importantly to Laurel, we found some French water fowl in one of the water pools in the Tuileries Gardens near the Louvre. Unfortunately, the French Duck union was on strike that week. So they just floated in the middle of the pool.





The Eiffel Tower - more climbing, oh goodie!!

Getting in the shorter line for the stairs rather than the elevators seemed like a good idea at the time ...





We made it to the second level. The only way up from there is to have a ticket for the vertical elevator.



This statue sure looked familiar in the lens of the camera, so we went to investigate. The neighborhood was not so nice, but it was her little sister for sure. The red arrow shows her location with respect to the Eiffel Tower.

Ok, back to work ...

Off to Rennes, France to give my talk
and hang out with Jean-Luc.



Saint Malo is a very pretty tourist town on the channel coast, we got there just in time for the sunset and a good seafood dinner after my talk. The walled city was basically destroyed during WWII and was rebuilt by a bunch of deranged condo machines to look old. They really didn't get it right.



Me and our tour guide. Jean-Luc LeGarrec, a Breton but still a nice guy. He was a post-doc in my lab in AZ while I was getting my degree.



On suggestion, we went to see the Celtic Alignments in Carnac. While not as exciting as Stonehenge, it's the same idea. Due to instabilities in the soil, you can't walk among the stones now. But the grass was cut somehow. It turns out that sheep do the grass cutting. (lower left)

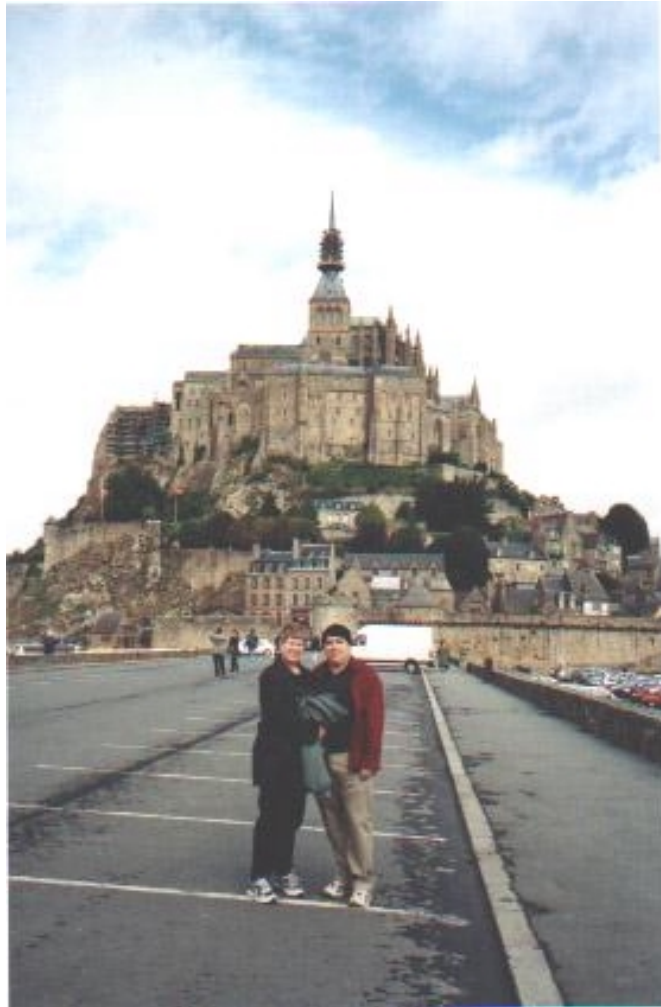




Next stop, Quiberon and the Cote Sauvage. A very rugged coastline on the Atlantic side. The coastline is littered with defensive positions running from WWII back to ancient times.

We managed to get a picture without befalling the typical Grand Canyon problem of backing off the edge.





Mount Saint Michael, 13th century abbey on the channel coast, complete with The Mother Hen restaurant (famous for omelets, which they only serve to us common folk outside regular mealtimes - we arrived at 12 noon - no omelet for us). Based on what we saw inside the Abbey, they also invented the 52" Phillips flat screen TV.

And then, vamp for 6 days before
returning to the US ...